Kant's great achievement was to recognize that the problem of dualism arose from the exaggeration implicit in the accepted conceptions of mind and world. Mind, having been defined as other than the natural world, could not then have its contact with the world explained. For Kant the mind constitutes reality; the world is an attainment of mind. Kant was succeeded by thinkers who extended and elaborated the mind's role in the construction of reality. In their work the mind was not just the medium in which the external world appeared it was the substance of experience itself. In short, human experience was identified as a dynamic network or system of judgements, as a 'phenomenology'. In such a system the faculties and capacities of the mind are not innate or natural but are made to be; they are an historical achievement. The intellect is a product of culture; it is, itself, an artefact of civilization.

The recognition that intellect was a set of acquired skills was itself sustained by the emerging view that human history had been a learning process, a progression, in which ability and civility had grown and developed. The most impressive account of such a process was presented in the work of J. G. von Herder. Herder had argued that the central element of human thought and expression was man's language. Language is not only the source we use to express and understand ourselves, but is also the repository of the common wisdom and outlook of a people. He saw the values and ways of a people as evolving organically in response to environmental factors; moral systems were not only relative to the culture but to the age. The understanding of any text or artefact was, therefore, to be related to the context of its creation and required a 'sympathetic' knowledge of the society and the period. Herder's abiding contribution to German thought was the image of the nation as a living being, almost a person, a spirit, and a corresponding faith in history as a dynamic force, a collective adolescence.

A. Farr, Sartre's Radicalism and Oakeshott's Conservatism
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Because of the emphasis he placed upon creative expression, Herder is often portrayed as one of the fathers of Romanticism but his view stood in marked contradiction to that of his fellow Romantic J. J. Rousseau. Where Herder saw advance and sophistication, Rousseau saw degeneration. While Romanticism is one of the more difficult passages in Western thought to characterize, mostly because its attributes dovetail into other interests and obsessions of that age, nonetheless its emblems are its hostility to sophistication, to the artificialities of courtly life, to the pieties of orthodox religion and to the nervous conformity of reformed religion, more generally to the dishonestly and rigidity of public life. Its enthusiasms were youth, intuition and courage. Generally, it sought an inner truth and a more thorough-going self-determination, in this sense, it has been seen as a fuller working of the principles of Protestantism. It found inspiration in nature and in retreat from association and corollary of the trust in intuition was a distrust and distaste of cultured society, for its mannerisms and conventions, its indulgence and dishonesty. The Romantics looked to the ordinary folk and found rustic charm and frankness. They looked to the young and saw spontaneity and hope.

In the work of Rousseau, Romanticism is expressed as an affection for man untainted by society, a belief in his inner goodness and brilliance, an abiding trust in his natural sentiments. It is constantly framed within the context of the isolated individual finding within himself an intuitive sense of purpose, an innate idea of life, one which is provoked by the challenges of this world, brought into sharpest relief by meditation upon the beauty and strength of nature. Rousseau ultimately offers an ambiguous view of social order which is acknowledged as being both the source of our corruption but also, after radical reform, of being the source of a new vitality. Social relations are then both the problem and a solution and, hence, bear the burden of the contempt for the established order and the promise of a new age. He sees mankind as stunted by bad habits and shallow self-appreciation, but capable or renewal and rebirth through a more thorough-going honesty. Most importantly Rousseau's political philosophy gave social change a moral dimension that was to permanently alter the nature of political thinking.

Whether protagonists sided with Rousseau or Herder, whether they saw civilization as progress or degeneration the debates they initiated generated the most dramatic shift in intellectual outlook